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## Increasing Social-Emotional Development Skills in Preschoolers

Skyler Thao

A Capstone project for the Bachelor of Science in Human Development and Family Studies

### **Introduction**

Many preschool children have not yet developed skills of emotional regulation, and often, emotional regulation is not being taught in their classrooms. When children struggle with regulating their emotions, they are more likely to be underprepared for Kindergarten, have their long term mental health be affected, and have conflict with their peers. To help address the lack of emotional regulation skills taught in preschool classrooms, I created a two-day lesson for the preschoolers at the Military Monterey Road Child Development Center in Seaside, California.

### **Needs Statement**

Preschoolers may not yet have developed the ability to identify and understand their emotions. During the time of children being in preschool, they become more adept at identifying emotional expressions (Denham et al. 1994). At this age, preschoolers should be able to start verbalizing why they are expressing a certain emotion, as well as understanding the emotions others feel as well. The risks of children not being able to identify and express their emotions during this time period can bring up questions about their development. Some of these risks include things such as not being able to express their feelings towards others, not recognizing social cues from their peers, and the possibility of not moving forward academically towards kindergarten.

Children in preschool are able to learn from their teachers and peers about emotions and how to react towards them. It is a transition time for these children to gain knowledge about themselves and how to act around the peers who surround them. In a typical preschool, the children are able to be more adjusted to their school environment, that then will lead to the opportunity to further adapt to the social and emotional demands of their classroom (Bailey et al. 2016). One study had shown that there is a continuous process of preschool classrooms needing

to support the developing competencies of children (Bailey et al. 2016). Which then also tells us that preschool classrooms may need more help with curriculum development and their social interactions.

Children being able to recognize social cues from their peers is a common behavior that should be occurring in preschool classrooms. Nelson, et al (2011) had found that preschool children will usually recognize visual aspects of emotional expressions first before recognizing vocal expressions. She stated that they can possibly recognize an emotional expression someone is showing, but not understand the tone of voice being used. Studies have shown that children who are progressing in their development should be able to identify emotions that could be seen as challenging (Cole et al. 2009). Preschoolers learning from social and emotional cues from their friends can not only help them in a school setting, but outside the classroom as well. Like being able to understand when a family member is upset at home or even seeing an angry person at the supermarket. Bisson (2019) found that if children are able to increase their accuracy at understanding emotions from the faces of others, they start to understand the cause and effects of how others feel. Following in with the idea that children can benefit from developing more emotional regulation.

Emotional regulation may be a key factor in determining preschoolers' kindergarten readiness (Bailey et al. 2016). Studies show that when children are able to understand emotions and state how they feel, it can allow them to understand the type of emotional responses they are receiving back from others (Denham et al. 1994). Overall, the lack of being able to identify and express emotional feelings can have a negative effect on preschoolers.

Many preschoolers have not yet developed the skills to explain how they feel emotionally towards another person. But also not fully understanding why a person is feeling a certain



emotion or showing a certain emotion. In order to increase their emotional regulation skills, I intend to provide a 2-day lesson to the preschoolers at the Monterey Road Child Development Center.

### **Theory**

Socially, preschoolers are in Bandura's Social learning theory where they are learning the importance of watching others' emotional reactions and imitating their behaviors and attitudes. In accordance with Social Learning Theory, preschoolers observe the individuals around them who model specific behaviors that they then start reacting to and learning from those individuals. Bandura says that these types of behaviors are learned from the surrounding environments and observational learning. Since preschoolers are still figuring out how to use their emotions towards others, it would be particularly helpful to interpret expressions on how they can express themselves when they react to things that make them mad, sad, happy...etc. Meaning that preschoolers can also benefit from comprehending why a certain emotional reaction could be acceptable or not acceptable when responding to something that made them feel that emotion. Bandura's social learning theory also includes that this type of observational learning would not be possible unless there were cognitive processes working. So these preschoolers do not automatically observe the behavior of another individual and immediately imitate it. In order to acquire behaviors, Bandura asserted there were mediational processes: Attention: If the behavior is noticed or not, Retention: If the behavior is or can be remembered, Reproduction: If the behavior can be performed, and Motivation: If there are perceived rewards that would outweigh the cons. These processes play into part of the series of lessons that I am creating to help preschoolers comprehend how to respond to emotional reactions.

### **Consideration of Diversity**

My project will be conducted at the Monterey Road Child Development Center in Seaside, California. The ethnic composition of the participants should reflect those who work in the military forces or are D.O.D civilian employees, as the majority of these participants are military children. As well as children of the staff members who work there. Currently the total population of a little over 37,000 individuals including family members who are part of the military in the Monterey area. Since these children come from military backgrounds, it is not unusual that they are in care the whole day from 6:30 am to 5:30 pm. So, they are spending most of their time with their peers and the staff who work with them. As a result of that, it could be possible that most of the children's interactions and observed learnings are mainly at the development center. With that in mind, the content I am implementing towards these preschoolers can be redesigned to incorporate their family life at home with the emotional regulation they are being taught in my lessons. This lesson is geared towards preschool children, possibly toddlers and would not apply in the same way towards older children, teens, or adults.

### **Learning Outcomes**

At the end of my project, participants will be able to...

1. Be able to express basic emotions such as happy, sad, angry, and surprised.
2. Interpret how they see the different types of emotions on paper
3. Identify how another peer(s) feel when they are asked questions about certain situations

### **Method**

#### **Day 1**

First, I introduced myself to the participants and explained to them why I was there and what they were going to do. I then asked the children if someone can raise their hand and tell me what emotions are (happy, sad, mad, etc...). After a quick discussion about what emotions are, I

showed 3 emotions (happy, sad, and surprised) and asked the kids to interpret how I was feeling. I then introduced the children to the book I was going to read to them. The book is called *Color Me Happy, Color Me Sad*, by Agnes Green with illustrations by Natalia Vetrova. The reading took about 8 minutes. After I read the book, I asked them what the book was about and what happened. To conclude the book, I asked the children if they could tell me and their peers what color in the book showed which emotion. To end this first day lesson, I asked the children to show me a happy face and gave them all a happy face sticker.

## Day 2

Today, I had the participants sit at a table with me and gave them each a piece of paper that was split into four squares. See Appendix A. I then gave them each one marker or coloring pencil. Next, I asked them to draw in box 1 what a happy face looks like. Then in box 2 to draw what a sad face looks like. Box 3 I asked them to draw what an angry face looks like. Then in box 4 I asked them to draw what a surprised face looks like. For the last part of this drawing activity, I asked the children to flip the paper over and draw the face they are feeling right now. Next, I had each child one at a time stand up and show us the face they drew on the back of their paper. As each child stood up and showed their peers, I had asked them all to tell me how (child's name) was feeling today.

To continue on with today's lesson, while the children were sitting at the table I told them I was going to ask them questions and they were going to use the paper they just drew to help answer. After I asked the question, they will point at the emotion drawn and say how they or a certain child would feel.

Questions:

How would (child's name) feel if (child's name) took their stuffed animal away from them before nap time?

How would you all feel if no one wanted to share the bikes outside during free play?

If (child's name) fell while running on the playground how would he/she feel?

### **Results**

Learning outcome 1 was that the participants would be able to express basic emotions such as happy, sad, angry, and surprised. After reading the book *Color me Happy, Color me Sad*, the participants were asked if they could show each of the four emotions mentioned before. I had also shown these emotions on my face after I had asked the participants for their expressions. They had all been able to express each of the four emotions on their own without being helped. I was able to visibly see each child show their expressed emotion, so I do believe that this outcome was met during this lesson.

Learning outcome 2 was that the participants would be able to express how they see the different types of emotions on paper (happy, sad, angry, and surprised). In Appendix A, I have provided a photograph of the paper I had drawn to show the children how I interpreted the emotions listed on paper. The children were able to use that as an example if they needed help. Only five out of eight children (63%) were able to fully interpret the emotional expressions on paper. Though this outcome was not fully met during this lesson, more than half of the participants were able to complete this outcome and that in itself is an accomplishment.

Learning outcome 3 was that the participants would be able to identify how another peer or peers feel when they are asked questions about certain situations using their picture drawing and verbal skills. The three questions I asked were:

How would (child's name) feel if (child's name) took their stuffed animal away from them before nap time?

How would you all feel if no one wanted to share the bikes outside during free play?

If (child's name) fell while running on the playground how would he/she feel?.

For question number one, all participants had verbally answered the emotion "sad." Then for question number two, three participants had answered with the emotion "sad" whereas five participants had answered with the emotion "angry." For the last question, three participants answered with the emotion "surprised," another three had answered with "sad," and lastly two had answered with "angry." Now as mentioned before, all children were able to answer verbally, whereas only five out of eight children were able to point to the emotion expressed on their emotions drawing. I believe that this outcome was met because all participants were fully able to identify how another peer would feel when asked a question. See Table 1 for responses of each participant.

### **Discussion**

I believe that two out of three outcomes were met. I think the children enjoyed the project and being able to express how they feel and could color. Even after I had told them we were done drawing, some of the children had asked me to "draw lines again" on their paper so they could draw some more. But, I do believe that outcome two was not fully met because the children who could not draw out emotions had all said that they did not know how to draw a happy face, sad face...etc., even after I had shown them my example drawing of emotions. So, I believe that those children who did not fulfil outcome two would need more help at home or in the classroom on being able to visibly see images and interpret them.

When it comes to theory, I believe that my results were consistent with Bandura's social learning theory. The children were able to show basic emotions when asked because they were able to observe their peers around them and imitate the emotions I had shown on my face. Even with learning outcome two not being met, I do believe the results were consistent with that as well. Since Bandura had said that children do not automatically imitate an action unless they are motivated to do so or have processed it, I think that will support the children would be able to accomplish the task

If I were to do this project again I would try to have more diversity of children in the classroom since I had done this project with the preschoolers I was given during the time I was with them. If I would have been able to combine children from the other classroom (Preschool B) ,then I would have gotten a more ethnically diverse group of children. I could also have had different ages of preschoolers to be more inclusive as well. Since there are some who are a little older and ready to move out of the preschool classroom and some who are fairly new to preschool given their age and birth date cut off. I would also make sure that I were to do this project while not being clocked in for work. Due to that, I could be taken out of the classroom at any moment (since the preschool rooms are not my own personal classroom) and be put into a toddler or infant classroom at the center. I also wish that I could implement this project at the right time of day that would allow me to have plenty of time with the children. Since these classrooms have a schedule they follow every day, it made me do my project at a certain time within a time crunch. For instance, I would not want to do this project right before their nap time because they have lunch and would be tired or even too excited to sleep. Overall, I think the children benefited from the participation because they got to experience something a little new

out of their daily routine. But also were also to learn emotional skills that could really benefit their daily life and experiences at the Child Development Center.

## References

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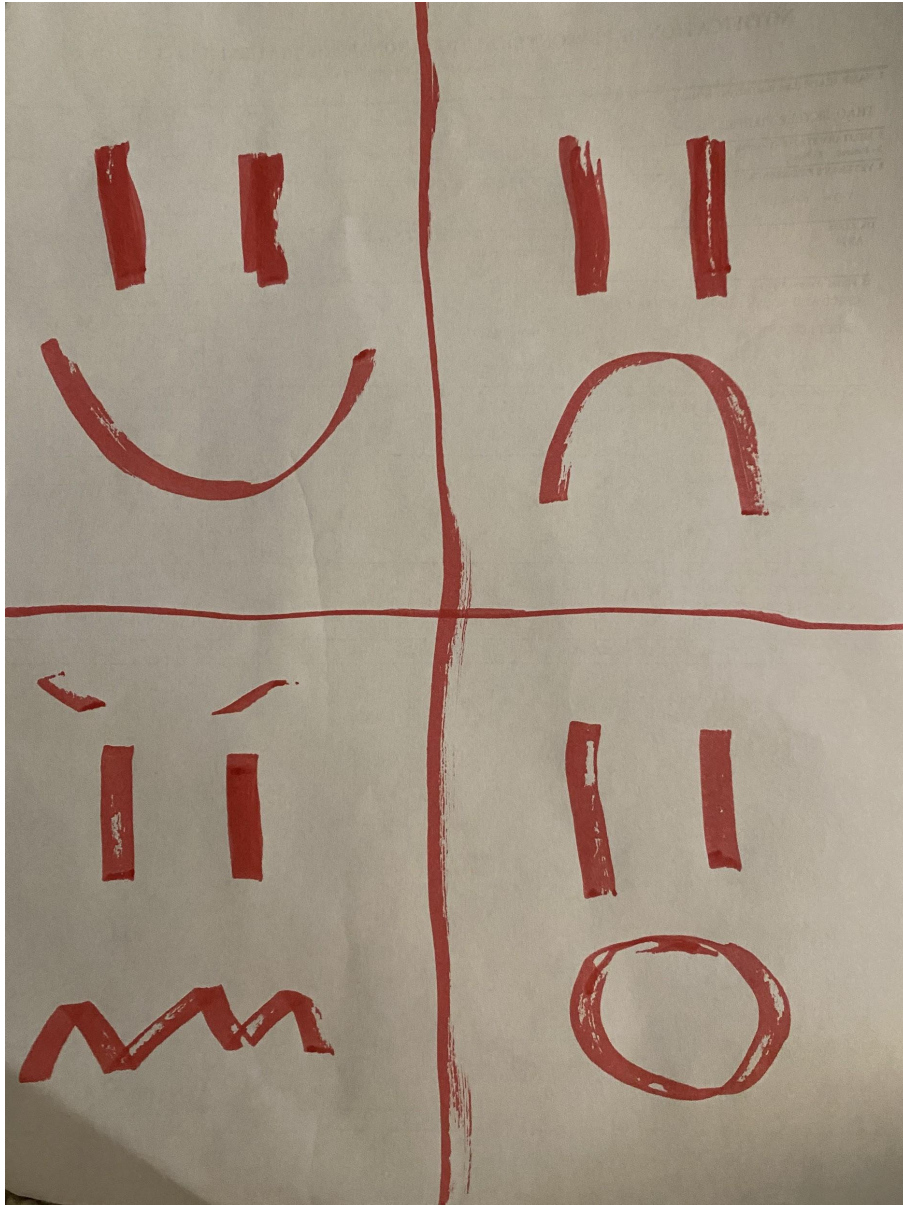


Table 1

Answers for questions on learning outcome #3

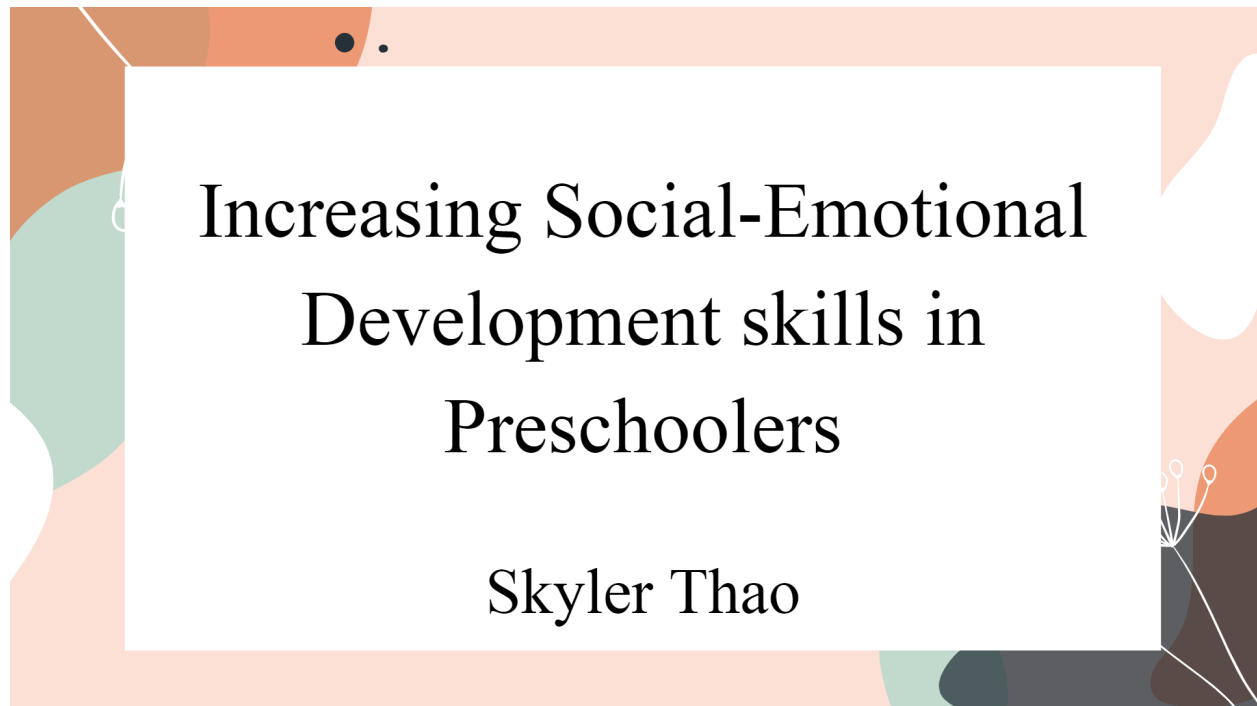
	Question #1	Question #2	Question #3
Avy	sad	sad	surprised
Reagan	sad	sad	sad
Zoelle	sad	sad	surprised
Kaleanna	sad	angry	angry
Jax	sad	angry	angry
Juliana	sad	angry	sad
P.J. (Patrick)	sad	angry	sad
Tyson	sad	angry	angry

Appendix A



Appendix B

Presentation from Capstone Festival

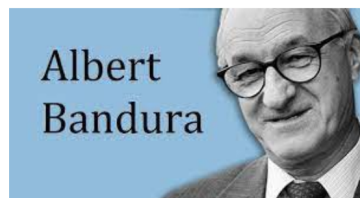


## Needs Statement

- Children need help in developing strategies to help build and manage their social emotional skills
- Many preschool children do not have the skills to identify feelings or be able to read facial cues
- Lacked in preschool settings

## Theory

- Bandura's Social Learning Theory
- Mediational Processes
- Learning importance of watching others emotional reactions
- Imitating behaviors and attitudes



## Monterey Road Child Development Center

- Preschool A Classroom
- 8 Preschoolers
- 2 Day Lesson Plan



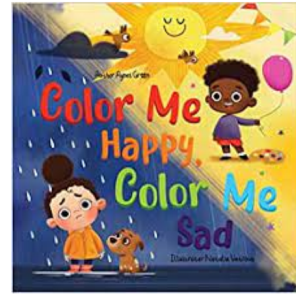
## Learning Outcomes

At the end of my project, participants will be able to...

1. Be able to express basic emotions such as happy, sad, angry, and surprised when asked
2. Interpret how they see the different types of emotions drawn on paper
3. Identify how another peer(s) feel when they are asked questions about situations

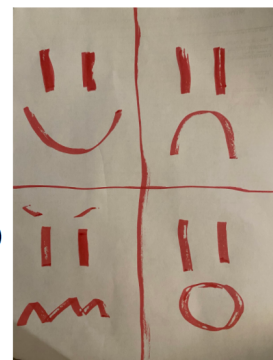
## Day 1

- Introduced myself and explained what we were going to do
- Asked if they knew what emotions are and could show me
- Read the book Color Me Happy, Color Me Sad by Agnes Green
- Then had a small discussion about the book



## Day 2

- The children were given a piece of paper split into four squares and a crayon
- They were then instructed to draw how they saw an emotion in each square (happy, sad, angry, and surprised)









## Day 2

The children were then instructed to use their drawings to answer the following questions

1. How would (child's name) feel if (child's name) took their stuffy away from them before nap time?
2. How would you all feel if no one wanted to share the bikes outside during free play?
3. If (child's name) fell while running on the playground, how would he/she feel?



	Question #1	Question #2	Question #3
Avy	sad	sad	surprised
Reagan	sad	sad	sad
Zoelle	sad	sad	surprised
Kaleanna	sad	angry	angry
Jax	sad	angry	angry
Juliana	sad	angry	sad
P.J. (Patrick)	sad	angry	sad
Tyson	sad	angry	angry

## Results

Learning outcome #1 : All participants were able to express listed emotions (happy, sad, angry, surprised)

Learning outcome #2: Five out of eight students (63%) could interpret the listed emotions on paper

Learning outcome #3: All participants were able to identify their own and other emotions from their peers

- 3 verbally
- 5 verbally and on paper

## Discussion

### Did it work?

- Children loved the activities
- Appropriate for age group

### What would you do differently?

- Not be in-ratio/clocked into work
- Change questions to be more universal in different preschool settings
- Pick a better time frame during day to do project



Thank you, Any questions?

Skyler Thao